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Five Years of Political Catholicism

By AVRO MANHATTAN

To any observer of Catholic affairs, one of the most remarkable features of the post-war years is undoubtedly the fact that the Vatican is no longer the remote institution it used to be; even for the man in the street it has become a political entity as real and as concrete as Washington or Moscow. Broadly, this can be attributed to: (a) the successful re-emergence of a militant political Catholicism; (b) the consolidation of the Vatican-American partnership; and (c) the sharpening relations between East and West.

The similarity of the strategies adopted by the Vatican in the years following the First and the Second World War is undoubtedly striking; in both cases its exertions being directed against the same opponent: Communism. The parallel, however, while close is not necessarily correct. For certain cardinal factors, although in existence two decades ago, were not then paramount, as they are now. And it is this paramountcy which has mostly contributed to the Vatican's contemporary pre-eminence in world affairs.

After the First World War the Vatican was, as now, challenged by Communism. Three decades ago, however, Communism was not the global force that it is today. Although potentially dangerous, it was unorganized, inexperienced, blundering, and in a fluid state. Its embodiment, Russia, was chronically on the verge of collapse, and, while a revolutionary beacon, her dangerousness was mainly confined to the theoretical field, whereas her military potentialities, when compared to those of her opponents, were almost negligible.

Notwithstanding the fact that then, as now, the Vatican was gravely concerned with Communism's world-wide implications, it nevertheless

limited itself to the formulation of an anti-Bolshevik strategy, to be worked almost entirely within the boundaries of Europe, where Red incursions were gravest, and after a period of indecision about whether or not to use its Catholic parties it decided to support extreme Right-wing movements, openly becoming totalitarian in a totalitarianized Europe during the next twenty years. Thanks to this, the spectre of Bolshevism in Europe was made to vanish and Russia's eventual downfall was apparently assured when in 1941 the armed might of a Fascized continent was at long last hurled against the U.S.S.R.

But the collapse of Fascism automatically spelled the collapse of the Vatican's strategy. With the dawning of peace the Vatican found itself in a far more precarious situation than it had ever been in the recent past. Well-organized, determined Communist parties, which had sprung up everywhere, seemed to be dangerously near to seizing many post-war Governments; in Eastern Europe they actually got into power altogether, freezing over fifty million Catholics within their domains. Russia, palisaded behind a double wall of a dozen European and Asiatic Red countries, as well as behind an impenetrable iron curtain, had become the paramount challenger of the U.S.A., her sole peer.

Yet, although one of the defeated, the Vatican was soon able to side with the victors—indeed, to become their chief ally. How did it do it? The Vatican, being once more true to itself, by accomplishing one of its traditional somersaults had turned democratic in a democratized world. Its caprioling, besides having been timely chosen, had been skilfully and cunningly performed. It was done

when the Fascist Powers, although cracking, were not yet defeated; it was carried out by playing on the fear of the Allies; and it was transformed into a *fait accompli* when finally the Vatican, having in 1943 become an important factor in the downfall of Mussolini, in the following year confronted the Allies with a resurrected political Catholicism.

As in 1922-23, when the Vatican, having definitely embarked on a policy of mutual alliance with Fascism, decided on the disintegration of the young Italian Catholic Party, thus clearly indicating the path along which it had decided to travel, so in 1944-45 the creation of the first *post-bellum* Catholic movement in Italy was the first ominous indication of the new strategy which the Vatican had decided to follow. The Christian Democratic Party had become not only the new instrument with which the Vatican intended to cope with a reversed situation, but also the prototype upon which all subsequent Catholic parties were to be modelled.

In no time political Catholicism became the domineering force in the ideological structure of the new Europe. In Italy it repeatedly defeated the combined forces of the Left, and now it rules with a velvet-gloved fist as a democratically disguised Right-wing authoritarianism, which in fact it is. In France the M.R.P. is endlessly supplying the ever-changing Premiers and Foreign Ministers. In Belgium the Christian Social Party (P.S.C.), besides giving Catholic Premiers, has been splitting the nation for years on the issue of the return of Catholic King Leopold. In Austria the Volkspartei (People's Party) has become paramount. In Holland, a half-Protestant country, the most important Ministries have been and are held by Catholics. In Germany Catholics have banded into a redoubtable *bloc*, and it is no mere coincidence that the first President and the first Reich Chancellor are both devout Catholics. With the dawn of 1950 a Catholic was holding the most important office in each of the following countries: Austria (Dr. Leopold Figl, Chancellor), Belgium (Gaston Eyskens, Prime Minister), France (Férolé Bidault, Prime Minister; Robert Schuman, Foreign Minister), Germany (Dr. Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor), Ireland (John Costello, Prime Minister), Luxemburg (Pierre Dupong, Prime Minister), Netherlands (J. R. H. van Schaik, Vice-Premier); while, of course, in the Iberian peninsula Portugal's Prime Minister, Salazar, and Spain's Chief of State, Franco, continue to hold undisputed sway, as of old. Thus, after only five years, resurrected political Catholicism is at the head of ten European Governments west of the Iron Curtain. The list is an impressive one and speaks more than any

words can do of the extraordinary success of the Vatican's newest strategy.

In Eastern Europe, although Catholic political influence is officially considered "blotted out," the Vatican's power is exercised with more effectiveness than Communist rulers like to admit. Whereas practically all other anti-Red opponents have gone underground, the Vatican alone persists with unceasing pertinacity to defy the enemy within its very gates, thus producing a political frictional force which no authoritarian Government can ignore or even less neglect.

These two feats, when added to other cognate ones, inevitably led to the strengthening of the unwritten alliance with the U.S.A. With the disappearance of the two main anti-Bolshevik bastions, Germany and Japan, their anti-Communist role had of necessity to be played by a power with equal if not bigger war potentialities. The U.S.A., being the only country with such qualifications, had, ironically enough, to go on with the task begun by the Fascist partners. It was thus that, owing to the rift between Russia and her former Allies having turned into a cold war, the two hostile *blocs* soon had to formulate a new politico-military strategy in which economic and ideological factors were assigned a very important place.

For a war, whether hot or cold, to be effective needs to be fought not only with steel or economic boycotts, but also with ideologies.

The U.S.A.'s weapon against the potential Bolshevization of Europe via economic collapse was the Marshall Plan, followed by the Atlantic Pact. The ideological one was supplied by the Vatican with its successfully organized political Catholicism, its parties being in the political field what Marshall Aid is in the economic. The two complement each other: hence the ever more intimate partnership between the Vatican and the U.S.A. as the gulf between East and West continues to widen. In this way, while the occupation army of MacArthur sees to it that the Nipponic island is prevented from being attracted into the orbit of Soviet Russia, in Europe political Catholicism sees to it that European and Russian Communism is checked, with a view to paralysing it altogether.

This American-Catholic partnership works simultaneously in the national and the international fields. The fact that the Tribunals for un-American activities and the national witch-hunt of the Reds in the U.S.A. were closely followed by the repeated condemnation of the Vatican, which finally culminated last July in the decree of excommunication against any Catholic supporting or even reading Red literature, is no mere



coincidence. These were the inevitable fruits of the co-ordination of a grand strategy worked out by the U.S.A. and the Vatican in accordance with the reciprocal assurances exchanged by Truman and Pius XII in August, 1947, when the President took the unprecedented step of pledging the material resources of the U.S.A. to the Catholic Church and "to all the forces striving for a moral world," while the Pope pledged "whole-hearted co-operation from God's Church" for the U.S.A. in her anti-Bolshevik crusade.

There are indications that history is repeating itself. As after the First World War the real or fictitious menace of Communism became the spring-board from which Right-wing totalitarianism was established in Europe, so now the same menace, perhaps more concrete than in the past, is helping the Catholic Church to consolidate itself, politically and spiritually, all over Europe;

indeed, to penetrate as never before the very citadel of American Democracy. The democratic forces of both continents, while accepting political Catholicism as an ally the better to check Communism, seem to forget that such an allegiance ultimately might turn out to be as pernicious as a surrender of democratic principles, either to the forces of the Right or to those of the Left.

Authoritarianism and Catholicism, even when reciprocally hostile, are nonetheless twin brothers. Both are ideologically dogmatic, intolerant, and totalitarian. To use the devil to cast out the devil has always been a dangerous affair. European and American democracy should not, while opposing one, forget the other. For the Vatican, as in the recent past, is out to conquer not only its enemies but also its friends.

My Heresy

No, I don't mean Marxism. I mean by my heresy the opinion that the Shakespearean plays (demonstrable changelings and patchwork excepted) were written by Shakespeare of Stratford and not by Bacon, Oxford, or another.

Why "heresy," you ask? I reply: because today, to pass muster with intellectuals, you must hold that the plays were written by—well, anyone you like, provided it is not the "Stratford clown." So, as an obstinate Stratfordian, I am by modern intellectual standards a heretic and out of court.

The first favourite for the vacant throne used to be Bacon. Now, Baconianism being somewhat "blown on," the candidate of the day appears to be Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford. What I am about to say "goes" for either hypothesis.

Both Bacon and Oxford, on any showing, were scholars and courtiers, familiar with the learning of their time and with the great world. No one who knows the *Novum Organum* or the *Essays* can see Bacon committing a "howler." Oxford, though not a philosopher like Bacon, was at least a university man and versed in public affairs. Now, my case is that the author of the plays constantly commits "howlers"; that he answers exactly to Ben Johnson's description of Shakespeare as having "small Latin and less Greek"; that he knew less geography than one would expect of any Elizabethan courtier of the standing of Bacon or Oxford; that he knew of history just what he could pick up from North's *Plutarch* and Holinshed's *Chronicle*, and no more; that, in short, while his gift of language and his

dramatic imagination were unrivalled, his knowledge of the world was such as might have been attained by the son of a Stratford burgess, with no more than a grammar-school education, but with extensive knowledge of the London stage and its aristocratic patrons.

There is abundant evidence of this in the plays. Would Bacon or Oxford, if they had written *Troilus and Cressida*, have made Hector of Troy cite Aristotle? Would Bacon or Oxford, writing *Coriolanus*, have referred to the hero's wounds as showing "like graves i' the holy churchyard"?—a typical Shakespearean hyperbole, which we can imagine the Stratford actor-playwright tossing off as a tasty bit of "ham"; but historically a howler all the same.

Can we imagine Bacon or Oxford, or indeed anyone who knew the difference between Greeks and Romans, populating the Athens of *Timon* with citizens bearing such un-Attic names as Lucius, Lucullus, Sempronius, Ventidius, and the rest of them? That alone, if there were nothing else, would be enough to prove that the poet did not know his way about classical antiquity. Would Bacon or Oxford, in *Julius Caesar*, have made the mistake of calling one of the conspirators against Caesar "Decius Brutus," when the man's real *praenomen* was Decimus; or another "Metellus Cimber," when history knows only Lucius Tullius Cimber? Or would Bacon or Oxford have made a clock strike at a period of history when the only clocks were water-clocks and non-strikers? It is, to say the least, unlikely. But the man of Stratford might have done it.